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SUBJECT: EU CLASSIFICATION OF BORATES: ITALY WITH THE U.S.

REFTEL: USDOC 00939 (NOTAL)

1. On March 3, Post sent reftel demarche to Dr. Mariano Alessi at the Ministry of Health's Prevention Directorate, to Dr. Roberto Binetti of the Higher Institute of Health's Toxic Substances Department, and to Dr. Giuliana Gasparrini of the Environment Ministry's Office of EU Affairs. On March 7, SCI specialist spoke with Dr. Alessi, who responded that Italy did not support the EU proposal to classify borates as Category 2 reproductive toxicants. The GOI, supported only by Portugal, had unsuccessfully tried to persuade the EU to postpone the decision until the results of the Austrian Competent Authority's risk assessment. Dr. Alessi thought it was likely that the EU would go ahead with the decision to place borates and boric acid in Category 2.

2. In Italy, the population in Tuscany's Lardarello region is overexposed to borates from the natural steam, which is harnessed to produce geothermal energy. The steam contains a large load of dissolved minerals, including borates. For a long period prior to 1965, several thousand tons per year of borates were produced from the steam. Moreover, the potable water in almost all of Tuscany contains higher levels of borates than the WHO recommendation. Dr. Alessi emphasized that no health-related side effects have been noticed. To confirm this, the GOI has begun an epidemiological survey in the Lardarello area to detect any abnormal incidences of birth defects, birth-mortality, infertility, etc. The GOI also tried unsuccessfully to convince the EU to postpone the decision until the results of this study. SPOGLI